A Study on World War Two and the Missed Opportunities for Precursory Preventative Action

The Second World War was the deadliest, most violent, and most destructive armed conflict in modern history. The death toll is thought to be close to 80 million lost lives, approximately three percent of humanity's entire population[1] at the time. The five-year conflict rewrote the world's borders, forged some of the world's strongest alliances, and made what was previously called The Great War look like a tea party in comparison. But what had to be done to prevent this catastrophe, if anything?

The start of the Second World War was truly at the end of the first, at the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The saying 'The winners write the history books' holds true, as the Allied forces that brought Germany and company to its' knees were merciless in the hand they dealt. Many of Germany's allies were crippled, but Germany, who were to take the blame for the 'Great War', were given no quarter at all. Germany's terms and conditions[2] included, but were not limited to:

- An indefinite ban from involvement in the League of Nations (Undone 1926),
- 112 Billion German Marks (in today's money, $360 billion US) to be paid to the Allied forces,
- Rich coal mining territory to be handed over to France until reparations are paid,
- For Germany to take full blame for damages and loss of life related to the Great War,
- That Germany would never, without consent from the League of Nations, ally with Austria,
- A complete disbanding of Germany's air force and submarine fleet,
- A reduction of Germany's navy to six battleships (ships were permitted to remain in Germany's possession so long as they were demilitarized for civilian use),
- A reduction of Germany's armed forces to 100,000 men,
- A complete demilitarization of West Germany ('The Rhineland'), and
- The forfeit of all Germany's oversea territory, as well as additional land to France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania, Denmark and Belgium (a total of 13 percent of their territory)[3]

As you can probably imagine, the German populus wasn't all that happy with how much this crippled their country and economy. Much of this resentment was aimed at Germany's then-leader, Gustav Bauer, the individual who signed the treaty on Germany's behalf. This, among other things, was a factor in Germany's eventual favouring of Adolf Hitler's government over the previous seatings of their parliament[4]; it should be considered that Adolf Hitler's manipulation extended beyond just that of the clauses of the Great War, as his antisemitism-focused views also rallied support.

Another nation that felt it had been treated unfairly by the Treaty of Versailles was Italy, who had lost thousands of men and millions of dollars supporting the Allies and were outraged at the very few benefits it received from the treaty. It was promised bountiful territories from the Albanian and Adriatic areas and from it's border shared

[1] Dorling Kindersley Ltd., Rickard Holmes, 'World War II The Definitive Visual Guide' (2021)
[2] Treaty of Versailles, various authors (1919)
[3] 'German Territorial Losses, Treaty of Versailles, 1919', Holocaust Encyclopedia (n.d.)
[4] Oxford Big Ideas Geography, 'Causes of World War II' (n.d.)

with Austria-Hungary, however sovereignty concerns and Britain's problems with Italy's wartime performance reduced this down to two small territories and a small sum of Germany's reparation funds. Understandably, this resulted in anti-British prejudice in much of Italy's war-torn population.[5] Italy's wartime dictator throughout the Second World War, Benito Mussolini, twisted this hate into slander to aid his rise to power and eventual alliance with Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany.

Italy wasn't the only nation apart of the Allies that felt undervalued as a victor; Japan, who had just established themselves as a major world player, were left out of many of the Treaty of Versailles' spoils. Namely, their proposal for an additional clause regarding racial equality among nations[6] was denied by the League of Nations due to concerns from Britain and Australia regarding immigration after the war. It was also an unwise decision to allow Japan to keep their territory gained from China during related conflicts, as this (which was originally to compensate for the lack of racial equality) only served to fuel Imperial Japan's race for expansion of territory.

Japan, I believe, is the only one of the major Axis nations of the Second World War who could have been entirely prevented. That maybe if better decisions were made in the wake of war, Japan's involvement in it would have been of wishful thought at best, and that perhaps the war wouldn't have come to such an… explosive end. Ahem.

My thoughts on if the Second World War could have been avoided are a mixed bag, to say the least. Trying to draw a straight conclusion on all of the independent cause and effect is like trying to herd cats into a handbasket: it's messy, following one lead will lose the others, and in the end it probably won't sit right or still. The war wasn't a coincidence, not by any measure, but there's still too many direct precursors to the war that had all to do with the people in charge, and the beliefs of their people, to say that the war could have been prevented by simply doing things differently. Italy and Germany may both have used the unjust contents of the Treaty of Versailles to rally support, but people tend to consider this the be-all and end-all, which it most certainly is not.

I don't think that war could have been prevented. Tensions were high, and people were desperate following the Great Depression. I do, however, think that a *World War* could have been prevented had things be done differently, that the First World War could have remained the Great War, and that Project Manhattan and the destruction that followed was the price the world paid for its mistakes. No single leader failed. It wasn't capitalism, or socialism, or fascism that failed. *Humanity* failed. In the wise words of Ulysses Courier, *"War never changes. Therefore, Man must change."*[7]

[5] Reference.com, 'How Did the Treaty of Versailles Affect Italy?' (Staff Writer, 2015)
[6] Brittanica.com, 'Treaty of Versailles' (2017)
[7] Ulysses, 'Fallout: New Vegas' (2010)